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Suicide Prevention

The death of a friend, colleague, or family member as the result of suicide is a tragic event that is difficult to understand. When a member of our Coast Guard family ends their own life, we are all affected directly or indirectly by this loss.

Adding to our sense of loss is the frustration that results from the fact that there are few consistent patterns or trends that can be determined from our review of statistics to explain why these suicides have occurred. Regrettably, we have had five active duty members commit suicide since this fiscal year began. Over the past 12 years, there has been an average of 5 active duty members per year who have taken their own life.

In a HIGH OPTEMPO organization such as the Coast Guard, we will inevitably come across individuals who will be exhibiting signs and symptoms that suggest suicide may be a consideration in their lives. Each of us must make the commitment to become familiar with and recognize these symptoms, identify individuals who may be in trouble, and help them to seek assistance. Our collective ability to do so may help save a life.

Senior leaders, field commanders, and front-line supervisors are critically important in our efforts to address this tragic issue. To that end, it is important that leaders do the following things:

- Cultivate a working environment and culture that conveys the message that asking for help is a sign of strength. Encourage members who may be facing difficulties to reach out to a friend, a family member, a religious/spiritual leader, a therapist or to the support network provided by the Coast Guard.
- Ensure that suicide prevention training is provided to all members. Our training and awareness efforts ask individuals to examine their own lives; assemble “support networks” before they are needed; manage stress; recognize depression in themselves, co-workers, family members and friends; and to learn how to seek help when needed.
- Know what resources are available to assist both the command and the individual member, and to ensure that information is made available to all personnel.
- Once a member has been identified as depressed or potentially suicidal, intervene; ensure that all available resources are used to

provide appropriate care. Follow up with any referrals or requests for assistance made to make sure that continuity of care is provided.

Members of Team CG can obtain confidential assistance through the **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**. The EAP is a professional counseling and referral service designed to help you with your personal, job or family problems. It is free, voluntary, and **confidential**. This program provides professional counselors who are prepared to assist you with virtually any issue or problem that may arise such as emotional, family, interpersonal relationship, alcohol/drug use, job, and legal or financial problems. To obtain assistance, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, simply call **1-800-222-0364**.

Help for the command or an individual is also available with a call or visit to an **Employee Assistance Program Coordinator (EAPC)** at a regional work-life office. These offices are located at Integrated Support Commands across the country. To contact the nearest office, **call 1-800-872-4957** followed by the extension listed next to these ISC locations: Alameda (252), Boston (301), Cleveland (309), Honolulu (314), Ketchikan (317), Kodiak (563), Miami (307), New Orleans (308), Portsmouth, (305), San Pedro (311), Seattle (313), St. Louis (302), and Washington, DC (932). Discussions of problems with an EAPC are also **confidential**.

Members may seek help from the Chaplain Corps, which is another confidential source of assistance. Health providers and military treatment facilities (many are on call 24 hours a day) are also available to assist.

The most difficult thing for many members to do when dealing with any problem that appears to be too big to handle, is to ask for help. The majority of people around us, whether they are a friend or a stranger, are willing to help someone in need. Each of us should do our part to ensure that our culture encourages our members and their families to ask for help when problems arise, and to ensure that the resources needed to address these problems are available when they are needed.

Regards, Ken Venuto



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